

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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P 241619Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6821

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 5521

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SHUM, AR

SUBJECT: MASS MURDER HIGHLIGHTS TRELEW WEEKEND VIOLENCE

1. DURING THE WEEKEND, POLICE, WHO WERE ON SPECIAL ALERT FOR AN EXPECTED SURGE OF TERRORIST ATTACKS TO COMMEMORATE THE TRELEW MASSACRE OF AUGUST 22, 1972, KILLED FIVE EXTREMISTS IN CORDOBA AND ANOTHER TWO IN BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE. SIX OTHER PERSONS, DESCRIBED AS COMMON CRIMINALS, WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED IN CLASHES WITH POLICEMEN DURING THE WEEKEND.

2. AS IN THE PAST, THE TRELEW ANNIVERSARY PROVOKED A WEEKEND OF FIREWORKS--BOMB ATTACKS AND VOLLEYS OF MACHINEGUN FIRE. IN BUENOS AIRES, BOMBS EXPLODED IN A NUMBER OF POLICE STATIONS, ON FRIDAY'S RUSH-HOUR SUBWAY TRAINS, ON STREET CORNERS IN A FASHIONABLE DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT AND IN A STANDARD ELECTRIC FACTORY. THERE WERE NO DEATHS REPORTED, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL POLICEMEN WERE WOUNDED BY EXPLODING BOMBS. IN CORDOBA, THE THIRD ARMY CORPS CLAIMED IT HAD DISCOVERED AND NEUTRALIZED A PLAN TO TERRORIZE THE CITY WITH WIDESPREAD BOMBING AND SHOOTING ATTACKS.

3. LEFT-WING TERRORIST VIOLENCE, HOWEVER, PALED IN THE FACE OF THE GRISLY MASS MURDER OF THIRTY PERSONS BY "DEATH SQUADS" ON AUG 20. THE THIRTY BODIES, RIDDLED WITH BULLETS AND BLOWN APART BY POWERFUL EXPLOSIVES, WERE FOUND BY WORKMEN FRIDAY MORNING (AUG 20) IN A FIELD NEAR PILAR. A SIGN AT

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THE SCENE IDENTIFIED THE VICTIMS AS LEFTIST GUERRILLAS.

PRESUMABLY THEY WERE KILLED IN RETALIATION FOR THURSDAY'S MURDER OF RETIRED GENERAL OMAR ACTIS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE POLICE THEMSELVES WERE THE AUTHORS OF THIS ATROCITY (SEE PARAGRAPH 6). ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE BODIES WERE MUTILATED BEYOND RECOGNITION, THE VICTIMS WERE MOSTLY YOUNG MALES. MOST HAD THEIR HANDS TIED BEHIND THEIR BACKS. NEIGHBORS REPORT HEARING ROUNDS OF SHOOTING DURING THE NIGHT AND THEN AN ENORMOUS EXPLOSION.

4. LATER FRIDAY THE INTERIOR MINISTRY ISSUED ITS STRONGEST REPUDIATION OF EXTREMIST VIOLENCE TO DATE, ATTRIBUTING THE "VANDALISTIC EPISODE TO THE DEMENTIA OF IRRATIONAL GROUPS" AND PLEDGING TO USE ALL MEANS TO FIND AND PUNISH THOSE RESPONSIBLE. INTERIOR MINISTER HARGUINDEGUY, SPEAKING IN SALTA SATURDAY (AUG 21), REITERATED THE GOVT'S CONDEMNATION OF ALL FORMS OF EXTREMISM, FRIDAY'S MASS BOMBING AS WELL AS ATTACKS ON ARMED FORCES OFFICIALS.

5. WHILE MOST OF THE PRESS AVOIDED SPECULATING ON THE PILAR MASS MURDER, LA OPINION ON AUG 22 DEPLORED THE ATROCITY AND OPINED THAT UNLESS THE GOVT SOON MADE GOOD ITS PROMISE TO "MONOPOLIZE FORCE", IT MIGHT FIND ITSELF INCREASINGLY ISOLATED (I.E. FACING INCREASING POPULAR OPPOSITION). THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD SAID SATURDAY (AUG 21) THAT THE WEEK'S EVENTS-- KIDNAPPING OF TWO WELL KNOWN UCR LAWYERS, MURDER OF GENERAL ACTIS, AND THE PILAR MASS MURDER--ARE THE KIND OF ACTS THAT CAN PROVOKE CIVIL WAR. IN ITS EDITORIAL, THE HERALD SAID THAT SINCE THE MURDERS OF THE FIVE PARISH PRIESTS IN JULY, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PRETEND THAT THE DAILY DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ARE SIMPLY RESULTS OF SUBVERSIVE DELINQUENTS OR VENGEANCE KILLINGS. "SOME MINDLESS FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER HAS GONE BERSERK," SAID THE HERALD, POINTING OUT THAT DESPITE THE GOVT'S OFFICIAL CONDEMNATION OF ACTS BY "DEMENTED, IRRATIONAL GROUPS," NOT A SINGLE MEMBER OF SUCH GROUPS HAS YET BEEN TAKEN BY SECURITY FORCES.

6. A RANKING OFFICER IN THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY CONFIDED TO EMBOFF AT NOON TODAY (AUGUST 23) THAT FOR FIRST TIME GOVT IS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN AS TO WHO AUTHORIZED THE CRIME AND HAS EVIDENCE. IN CASE OF THE FIVE PRIESTS, HE SAID, GOVT HAD STRONG REASONS
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TO SUSPECT POLICE AND EVEN HAD NAMES OF INDIVIDUAL POLICEMEN IT BELIEVED MAY HAVE COMMITTED OUTRAGE, BUT IT LACKED PROOF. GIVEN DELICACY OF SITUATION AND NEED TO AVOID INSTITUTIONAL RUPTURES AND ACTS WHICH WOULD DEMORALIZE SECURITY FORCES, GOVT MUST PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY. UNLESS SURE OF ITS FACTS AND WITH EVIDENCE IN HAND, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR GOVT TO MOVE TO CORRECT ABUSES. IN CASE OF THE MASS MURDER ON AUG 20, HOWEVER, GOVT IS REPEAT IS SURE AND HAS EVIDENCE. SANCTIONS WILL DEFINITELY BE TAKEN

AGAINST THOSE RESPONSIBLE, HE SAID. ONLY QUESTION IS
WHETHER SANCTIONS ARE PUBLICIZED OR TAKEN PRIVATELY.
IN EITHER CASE, HE PROMISED TO INFORM EMBASSY OF ACTION
TAKEN.
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